

## ‘I am still me’: The Self and Life quality as an Intervention for Dementia

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### Abstract

Individuals with dementia experience a variety of different symptoms, as all structures and functions of the brain are influenced, have increasing and multidimensional needs, tend to have low life quality, and to ‘lose themselves’ as the disorder progresses. Formal care and treatment of dementia aims at improving the life of the sufferers, yet often sets compartmentalized goals, and becomes impersonal and generic- thus less effective, despite the efforts. With these in mind, a holistic approach towards dementia arises. The goal is to enhance the self and improve life quality, while delaying the progression of the disorder. The self is seen as composed of a somatosensory, a cognitive, an emotional, a behavioral and a social aspect, along with psychological properties of the self (such as self- knowledge, or self- resilience). All these aspects are influenced by the disorder, thus are targeted through the intervention. The intervention follows the person-centered rational and uses all arts as a stimulus. It is composed of sessions with activities- each of which has a somatosensory, a cognitive, an emotional and a behavioral/ social element, all of which are linked to the self and its properties. Previous research indicated the effectiveness of each element. The intervention was applied in ten case studies, with a qualitative and quantitative assessment (about the self, cognitive skills and life quality) occurring before and after. Results indicate that the intervention was efficient in enhancing the sense of self, delaying the progression of the disorder and improving life quality, and can be explained both through a neuroscientific and a psychotherapeutic perspective. Results imply that the self is a promising ‘target’ for a holistic approach (although more research is necessary), and can be applied both as a structured intervention, and as a rational of care and interaction, characterized by individualized approach and respect to the person’s uniqueness- their self.

### Biography

Sylva Sarafidou was born in Greece, in 1992. She studied Psychology and History of Art (BA), Neuroscience (MSc), Culture and Theology (AKC), Integrative Psychotherapy and Expressive Arts Therapies, Art Therapy Life Coaching, and now she is conducting her PhD research concerning the self and life quality in dementia. She has worked with the elderly, individuals with psychiatric disorders, children, individuals with addictions and healthy population. She has been conducting group sessions using the arts in elderly care units and psychiatric clinics and is a professor of psychology at an institute of professional education. She is the owner of Ideas, Center of Psychology, Neuroscience, Art, where sessions, seminars, neuropsychological evaluations and awareness events occur. She has been writing articles about psychology and art in magazines, has functioned as a peer reviewer, and has published several papers and a book entitled ‘Ideas: 253 Activities for Dementia’.



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